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ABSTRACT

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Romantic Partners, Best Friends, Mothers and Fathers: Links Between Adolescent Social Worlds

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Abstract

This study examined associations between the quality of adolescent relationships with mothers, fathers, best friends and boy/girlfriends. One hundred and sixty two adolescents from three high schools completed questionnaires, in a one-on-one setting, in which they rated parent and peer relationships on seven relationship features including commitment, satisfaction, respect, secure base effect, separation protest, proximity seeking, and companionship. Among dating adolescents, an additional scale indexed sexual activity and risky sexual behavior. Findings revealed a consistent negative association between girls' relationships with parents and peers. In contrast, boys' reported continuity between parents and best friends and a lack of association between parents and romantic partners. Among both boys and girls, parental closeness, especially to fathers, was negatively associated with sexual activity. Findings suggest that peers may compensate for weak filial ties and parental relationships may serve as a protective factor against over-commitment to peers and risky sexual behavior.

Romantic Partners, Best Friends, Mothers and Fathers: Links Between Adolescent Social Worlds

The idea that parent-child relationships inform adult sexual relationships is not new to scientific or popular theory, illustrated by the figurative notion that sons marry their mothers and daughters marry their fathers (See Freud, 1940; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hazan & Zeifman, 1999). Yet, in the world of adolescent romance, parents have had little place in research or folklore. Adolescent researchers have primarily confined their observations to peer influences, noting that peer interactions are most influential in shaping the course and nature of adolescent romances (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Furman & Simon, 1999; Shulman, Levy-Shiff, Kedem, & Alon, 1997). The sparse empirical work that has been done on parental influences has mostly supported the notion of mothers and fathers as out-of-touch with their son/daughters sexual development and romantic experiences and ineffectual in shaping them (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990; Furman, 2001).

Perhaps parents have greater influence than what prior research has uncovered. The majority of studies investigating parental influences on children's peer relationships has focused on the direct or overt strategies parents use to manage, supervise, and monitor their son or daughter's behaviors (Baumrind, 1991; Ladd, 1992; Ladd, Profilet, & Hart 1992). Recent theorizing on parental influences has shifted to discussions of how the family context may indirectly shape children's experiences in their peer relationships, noted in how parent-child closeness, parenting style and attachment shape close friend and romantic relationship outcomes (Allen & Land, 2000; Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Miller, 1993). A focus

on family context has a couple advantages over the traditional approach on direct influences. First, it is a good developmental fit with adolescence, where parents are less proximal to their child's peer interactions. Secondly, adolescent peer relationships function differently than childhood friendships, and share many provisions with parent-child relationships such as intimacy, commitment, and attachment features (Hazan, Hutt, Sturgeon, & Bricker 1991; Freeman & Brown, 2001; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Consequently, many features of relationship quality have equivalent meaning in parent and peer relationships.

In this paper, we present data on associations between the quality of adolescent relationships with mothers, fathers, best friends and boy/girlfriends, with a focus on connections between parents and romantic partners. A number of relationship quality features are examined, including sexual behavior, emotional commitment, attachment provisions, and companionship. We also explored whether the presence of a boy/girlfriend predicted the quality of adolescent interactions with mothers and fathers.

The link between adolescent relationships with parents and romantic partners has been described in competing terms, as independent, continuous, and compensatory. The notion that parent and peer social worlds are independent is based primarily on a Piaget-Sullivan framework (Furman and Simon, 1999; Youniss, 1980). According to this view, peer relationships are socially constructed in a fundamentally different manner than are parent-child relationships. Peer relationships are built upon shared understanding and reciprocity and maintained through consensual validation. In contrast, parent-child relationships are inherently role differentiated, where the parent acts to regulate interpersonal exchanges and the child acts as a passive or active recipient of information (Youniss, 1980). As Youniss argues: "The distinction between these

two types of socialization [parent and peer] suggests that there may be two social worlds of childhood with two separate lines of development stemming from distinctive forms of interpersonal interaction (1980, Pg. 8)". Studies supporting the independent model point out that adolescents enjoy greater intimacy and shared understanding with best friends and romantic partners than with mothers or fathers (Buhrmester, 1996; Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Hunter and Youniss, 1982). Furthermore, intimacy is more strongly associated between peer relationship types (e.g. same-sex friends and romantic partners) than between family and peer relationships (Connnolly, & Johnson, 1996; Furman, 2001).

From an attachment perspective, continuity is expected to occur from parent-child relationships to close friendship and especially romantic pair bonds. (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hazan & Zeifman, 2000; Rothbard & Shaver, 1991). The continuity theory holds that early supportive experiences in the parent-child relationship become internalized as cognitive representations of the relationship, called internal working models (Bretherton, 1990). In turn, working models of parent relationships are called upon or activated in future close relationships, especially attachment relationships. Attachment relationships can be identified by three primary cognitive behavioral features, proximity seeking in times of distress, secure base effect in non-distress, and separation protest following separation from an attachment figure (Morgan & Shaver, 1999). Hazan and Zeifman (1999) argue that adult sexual pair bonds activate the three behavioral features in a similar manner as parent child relationships. If pair bonds activate the same attachment system as the parent-child relationship, continuity is expected to occur since the same working model operates in both relationship types. This view has been expressed as the prototype hypothesis (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Hazan & Zeifman, 1999; Miller, 1993; Owens,

Crowell, Pan, Treboux, O'Connor, Waters, 1995), suggesting that parental bonds lay the foundation for all future close relationships, especially attachment relationships. Continuity, however, may be limited to adult love relationships.

Although a number of studies have documented continuity between parent relationships and adult romantic relationships, it does not appear to be expressed similarly in adolescence (Furman, 2001). Furman and colleagues (Furman, 2001; Furman & Simon, 1999) have wedded the Piaget-Sullivan model and the adult attachment framework to explain adolescent cognitive representations of romantic relationships. Furman argues that adolescents construct working models of romantic relationships built upon same-sex affiliative processes, not parent-child attachment processes. Affiliative provisions include friendship variables such as trust, companionship, intimacy, and reciprocity. According to Furman, these processes play a central role in shaping adolescent cognitive representations of best friend and romantic interactions. In contrast, attachment provisions such as commitment, secure base effect and separation protest play a secondary role in peer relationships and may not emerge as a significant influence until young adulthood, when a long-term sexual partner is sought (Furman & Simon, 1999). Using the adult attachment interview to code adolescent attachment classifications with parents, friends, and romantic partners, Furman (2001) found that parent classifications were somewhat unrelated to peer classifications but that a high level of concordance was found between friend and romantic attachment classifications. In summary, his findings support the idea that parent-child relationships are somewhat independent from adolescent romantic relationships.

Another possibility is that adolescent friendships and especially romantic relationships are negatively associated or discontinuous with respect to parent-child relationships. Adolescent

romances may present the first real challenge to the emotional primacy of parent-child relationships. Adolescents and adults gauge the quality of their romances in much the same way. Levesque (1992) examined correlates of romantic relationship satisfaction among 300 high school youth and found that adolescents and adults place the same value on commitment, communication, companionship, and passion. Whereas adults seek these provisions in long-term sexual relationships, adolescent romances typically last less than two months. In adolescence, however, romantic provisions may compromise or compete with the adolescents' family role, as a child who remains emotionally and behaviorally tied to a family system. Unlike adult romantic bonds, adolescent romantic partners typically do not replace parents as primary attachment figures (Freeman & Brown, 2001). Consequently, romantic partners and parents may begin to compete for the same pool of emotional provisions. The result is that closeness to romantic partners may diminish commitment, proximity seeking and secure base behavior in parental relationships. In this sense the two social worlds would show a negative association, which would point to the bi-directional nature of parent-peer linkages. Mainly that boy/girlfriends threaten and possibly erode emotional closeness between parents and their adolescent son or daughter.

A negative association would also be found if adolescent romantic relationships fulfill a compensatory function. In this sense, boy/girlfriends would not take away from closeness to parents, but fulfill an emotional support function that is otherwise missing in the adolescent's life. Rather than take-away from closeness to parents, the compensatory argument follows that emotionally committed relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends would be limited to those adolescents who lack emotional closeness to their mothers and/or fathers. The corollary to this

argument is that adolescents who remain emotionally close and committed to one or both parents will be less likely to become emotionally invested in a love relationship.

Understanding the association between parents and romantic partners in compensatory terms may help us understand adolescent sexual activity. Like adults, most adolescents do not progress to sexual intercourse until the relationship has reached some degree of emotional commitment (Levesque, 1992). Little is known, however, about what factors account for the considerable variability in the level of emotional commitment. In this study we examine whether parental relationship quality and romantic relationship quality predict commitment to sexual partners. An inverse relationship between family variables and romantic commitment may indicate that parents who stay involved in their adolescent's social life may discourage over-commitment to boy/girlfriends and, in turn, delay the onset of sexual intercourse. In the other hand, if compensation occurs in romantic relationships, weak filial ties may lead to precocious commitment and sexual behavior with boy/girlfriends.

Gender differences in the quality of adolescent relationships with mothers, fathers, best friends and romantic partners may also point to differences in how boys and girls integrate parent and peer social worlds in different ways. Girls tend to describe their parent and peer relationships as more intimate and nurturing than do boys (Berndt, 1982; Berndt & Perry, 1986; Monck, 1991; Shulman & Scharf, 2000). Also, adolescent and adult studies report that females seek greater commitment and emotional support from sexual partners (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Rostosky, Welsh, Kawaguchi, & Galliher, 1999). To be sure, popular views portray males as "sex crazed" and females as commitment oriented. Girls, more than boys, appear to share higher levels of disclosure, support, and commitment in their close relationships. Caretaking provisions

typically attributed to parent-child bonds become increasingly important in girls peer relationships through adolescence (Buhrmester, 1990), especially with boyfriends (Leaper & Anderson, 1997; Monck, 1991; Shulman & Sharf, 2000). It may be that girls expect similar provisions from parents and peers. In contrast, boys may compartmentalize relationships types and experience less shared functionality between relationship types.

Notwithstanding popular and theoretical conceptions, gender differences have not always received empirical support (See Feiring, 2000). A number of recent studies have shown that boys place a high value on emotional commitment in adolescent romantic relationships (Levesque, 1993), and do so increasingly over the high school years (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 1999, Rotosky, et al., 1999). Some adult studies have also found a lack of gender differences in the commitment of partners (Davis & Strube, 1993; Hendrick, Hendrick & Adler, 1988). In light of these inconsistencies it is difficult to predict how boys and girls may integrate parent and peer social worlds in different ways.

The primary aim of this study was to examine the associations between adolescent relationship characteristics with mothers, fathers, best friends, and romantic partners, to explore the nature of the association between adolescent close relationships. Within the focus on parent-peer linkages we were particularly interested in family-romance connections and implications upon adolescent sexual activity. In keeping with the Piaget-Sullivan hypotheses, we expected parent and best-friend social worlds would function somewhat independently of one another. In the case of boy/girlfriends, however we expected that a compensatory fit, or negative association would be found. This hypothesis rests upon an adult attachment framework, which posits that romantic relationships normatively acquire emotional provisions once exclusive to parental

relationships. More specifically, we hypothesize that emotional commitment, secure base behavior, separation protest, and proximity seeking behaviors may be tied to boy/girlfriends during adolescence if they are not met in the adolescent's familial context. Since this study is cross-sectional in design, a negative association between parent and romantic relationships could indicate emotional compensation, or that adolescent romances pull emotional provisions away from parent-child bonds. We examined the influence of adolescent romance on family context by comparing parent-adolescent relationship quality for those adolescents in a romantic relationship versus those not in a relationship. We expected that adolescents with romantic partners would report lower levels of closeness with parents, especially mothers. Finally, we examined the associations between parent-closeness and adolescent sexual activity. In keeping with our conception that parent and romantic relationships will evidence inverse associations, we expected to find sexual activity and risky sexual behaviors to be negatively associated with closeness to mothers and fathers. Hypotheses related to gender are not presented, however gender was entered as a factor in all analyses.

Method

Sample

A sample of 162 adolescents from three mid-western high schools participated in the study. The three high schools sampled in this study were located in two school districts, but they drew students from different population demographics. School 1 (n = 57) served families from suburban neighborhoods. Nearly all of the students sampled from this school came from middle-class (47%) and professional (43%) families. Only 10% came from working class families. School 2 (n = 51) was located in an urban setting. Students sampled from this school came from primarily middle class families (46%), as well as working-class (28%) and professional (26%) families. School 3 (n

= 54) was an alternative high school located in an urban setting, and students sampled from this school came from middle class (43%) and working class (41%) families. Only 16% of the students sampled from School 3 came from professional families. Samples from the three schools did not significantly differ by family structure or gender (see Table 1 for a breakdown of sample demographics by schools). Thus, although random sampling procedures were not used in this study, the combined sample demographics are fairly representative of adolescents from urban mid-western areas.

Respondents included 74 male and 86 female adolescents ranging in age from 14 to 19 years (M=16.81 years).[1] Respondents were currently enrolled in grade 9 (n = 6, 4%), grade 10 (n = 19, 12%), grade 11 (n = 48 , 30%), or grade 12 (n = 85, 53%). Over 65% of the respondents came from middle class families (family income ranging from $20,000-80,000), while 8% came from working class families and 22% came from professional families. Ethnicity was not reported by adolescents, although the region they were sampled from is primarily Caucasian (about 85%). Fifty two percent of the adolescents lived in never-divorced, two-parent families (n = 83), 31% (n = 50) lived in single parent households, and 13% (n = 21) lived in step-parent households.

Procedure

Respondents were recruited from required English classes and/or study hall classrooms during regular school hours. Response rates varied from 70% to 84% per classroom. Informed consent was obtained from school district personnel, students, and parents. As an incentive, respondents were given five dollars for their participation. Students were individually-administered a 25-minute questionnaire which included demographic data and the measures discussed next. Students were also administered a 30-minute structured interview not used in this study. Respondents who were unable to complete the questionnaire in the time allotted were allowed to return completed questionnaires later that day or the following day.

[1] Seven adolescents did not report demographic data.

Measures

Descriptive Information

All respondents provided information on their household composition (biological mother/father or stepmother/father), their parent's education level, family income, age and grade. In addition, they were asked to provide descriptive information about their current dating situation. First they were asked "Do you currently have a boy/girlfriend, or are you seriously dating someone". Those who responded "yes" were asked to respond to questions about relationship intensity, including how long they had been dating this person, how many hours they spent with this person at school, how many hours they spent with this person after school and on the weekends, and to rate whether time spent with this person was usually "alone" or "with friends" (on a 5-point scale).

Relationship Qualities

Respondents independently rated four members of their support network, including their mother, father, best friend, and boy/girlfriend. Four signature features of adolescent attachment were indexed including commitment, separation protest, secure base effect, and proximity seeking. Attachment scales were adapted from the Attachment Support Inventory (ASI; Freeman & Brown, 2001). Three additional scales tapped relationship satisfaction, respect, and companionship using items adapted from the Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI; Furman & Burhmester, 1986). Prior studies using the ASI and NRI have reported high internal consistency alpha for each of the seven scales used in this study.

Respondents provided background information on each of the four figures rated. Respondents who had more than two parents (i.e. stepmother or stepfather and a living biological

mother and/or father) were asked to rate the two parents with whom they live. For best friends, respondents were asked to rate their "closest same-sex friend". For romantic partners, respondents were asked to rate their "boy/girlfriend, the person you are dating" and to leave the items blank if they are not currently dating. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale, with higher ratings reflecting higher levels of support from each person rated. The number of items indexing each relationship quality varied.

Scale scores were calculated by summing scores for items in each scale described below. Table 2 provided the means, standard deviations, and score ranges for the parents, best friend, and romantic partner relationship qualities. Scale scores were used in further analyses. Internal consistency alphas were calculated for each of the scales.

Secure base. Three items asking about secure base behaviors such as "How much does this person make your life feel more secure and manageable?" and "How much does just knowing that this person I available make you more confident in the things that you do". Reliability for this scale ranged from .85 to .87.

Separation-protest. Two items asked about a respondent's reaction if separated from each member of their support network, including items such as "How hurt would you feel if this person was unavailable when you needed to see him/her." Reliability for this scale ranged from .70 to .77.

Proximity seeking. Five items assessed the respondent's proximity seeking behaviors with each member of their support network, including such behaviors as "sharing secrets and private feelings", "talking with this person about things you don't want others to know", and

"seeking this person's point of view on things that most concern you". Reliability for this scale ranged from .87 to .89.

Commitment. Five items assessed the respondent's commitment to and feelings of commitment from each close relationship, with items such as "How sure are you that this relationship will last no matter what" and "How much does this person really care about you". Reliability for this scale ranged from .86 to .91.

Relationship satisfaction. Two items asked about a respondent's satisfaction and happiness with the relationship, with items such as "How happy are you with the way things are between you and this person?". Reliability for this scale ranged from .70 to .93.

Respect. Three items asked about the extent to which relationships with each member of their support network provided a feeling of respect and "liking" with items such as "How much does this person treat you like you're good at many things?". Reliability for this scale ranged from .80 to .89.

Companionship. Three items asked about the extent to which respondent's spent their free time with each member of their support network, with items such as "How much do you play around and have fun with this person?" and "How often do you go places and do enjoyable things with this person?". Reliability for this scale ranged from .79 to .89.

Sexual Activity

The extent and nature of adolescent sexual activity was assessed using adapted items from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (DHHS, 1997). Adolescents were asked to respond to sexual activity items whether they currently had a boy/girlfriend or not. These data were only available from School 3 due to consent issues with the school districts for Schools 1 and 2.

Sexual intercourse.

Respondents were asked; "Have you ever had sexual intercourse (gone all the way)?". Responses were treated as a dichotomous variable (intercourse or no intercourse), which was used in further analyses. Those who reported having had sexual intercourse also responded to items related to risky sexual behaviors.

Risky sexual behaviors.

Respondents who had had intercourse were asked a series of five likert-style questions related to risky sex behaviors. They were asked to select the number of different male partners with whom they have had sexual intercourse, ranging from one to six or more persons, and to select the number of different female partners with whom they have had sexual intercourse, ranging from one to four or more persons. In addition, they were asked how frequently they and/or their partner used birth control, and how often a condom is used during intercourse, on a five-point scale ranging from "never" to "always". Lastly, they were asked whether they or their partner had used a condom the last time they had intercourse, with "yes" or "no" as response choices. Risky sex scale scores were calculated by summing scores for four items, for males and females separately. Reliability of the risky sex behaviors was .71 for males (female partners only) and .76 for females (male partners only).[2]

Prior pregnancy.

Respondents who have had sexual intercourse were asked "How many times have you been or gotten someone pregnant?". Response choices included "0, 1, 2 or more times" or "not sure".

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[2] Two male adolescents reported having intercourse with a male partner once or twice, and one female reported having intercourse with a female partner once. Because of the nature of the questions (such as condom use), these three cases were dropped from further analysis.

Influences on sexual activity decisions.

All respondents who have not had sexual intercourse were asked to check the factors which influenced their decision not to have intercourse. The list of possible influential factors included two items related to parents, "One of both of my parents would object" and "parents have taught me the advantages of waiting until I'm older". Two items were related to peers, "Most students in my school don't have sex" and "my friends don't have sex". Two items were related to morals, "I don't think it's right for a person my age to have sex" and "I have chosen to wait until I'm married", and four items related to the risks of sexual activity, including items about getting caught, sex education, sexually transmitted disease, and pregnancy. Scale scores were calculated by summing responses to each scale item. Alphas for these four scales ranged from .50 to .80.

Results

Plan of Analysis

Descriptive statistics, Pearson r correlation coefficients, and t-tests were used to answer the research questions in this study. Descriptive statistics were used to describe sample and scale characteristics and are reported for all the scale scores.

The next set of analyses dealt with associations between relationship between parent and peer relationship quality. Based on our conceptual framework we suspected that gender may significantly influence the way parent and peer relationships are integrated. To test for gender effects a number of multiple regression analyses were conducted, which included interaction terms (e.g. gender by parent relationship qualities). The beta coefficients for the interaction terms were significant across multiple relationship quality variables. Based on empirical findings and our conceptual framework, the sample was reduced by splitting out correlational

analyses by gender. Simple correlations were conducted for each relationship quality variable between parent and peer relationships. Hence, separate correlation matrixes are reported for associations between parents and romantic partners, parents and best friends, and best friends and romantic partners. Based on the small sample size within each gender group (sample sizes per analyses ranged from n=33 to n=76), multiple regression analyses were not appropriate for examining multiple predictor variables simultaneously (The ratio of n size to the number of predictors was less than recommended; 15 subjects per predictor variable). In addition these analyses were exploratory and we were interested in the simple bivariate correlations between relationship types for each of the seven relationship quality variables.

Group comparisons were made between adolescents with and without romantic partners. The focus of these analyses was to examine the influence of romantic partners on parent and best friend relationship qualities.

Descriptive Statistics

Preliminary analyses were conducted to check for demographic differences in each of the schools sampled, and to explore similarities and differences among adolescent close relationship types (parent, friend, and romantic partner). Table 1 presents the demographic qualities for the participants in each of the schools sampled. Although ethnicity is not provided, according to the schools sampled, less than 10% of the student body are minority students, and approximately 90% come from Euro-American families. Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for relationship quality qualities for mothers, fathers, best friends, and romantic partners. Although there were slight differences by grade, they were not large or statistically significant, and thus are not reported here. There were gender differences, and these are reported in Table 2.

Associations of parent-adolescent relationship qualities with romantic partner and best friend relationship qualities

To explore the strength and direction of associations between adolescent close relationship qualities with parents, romantic partners, and best friends, Pearson r correlations were computed for those adolescents reporting to be in a romantic relationship. Associations between parental relationship qualities and peer relationship qualities revealed consistent gender differences in the pattern of associations and also the effect sizes. Therefore, although the power to detect statistically significant associations was reduced slightly by splitting out the sample and reducing the sample sizes for individual analyses, the data in Tables 3-8 are reported separately by gender to identify the unique pattern of associations for males and females. The results in

Table 1

Sample Demographics by School

	Education level						Family Income			Gender		Family Composition		
	Father			Mother										
Sample	Grade	High	College /Prof	Grade	High	College /Prof	Low	Mid	High	Male	Female	Two	Step	Single
School 1 (n = 57)	2	4	42	1	5	42	1	28	19	27	29	29	9	7
Urban	(04)	(08)	(88)	(02)	(10)	(88)	(02)	(58)	(40)	(48)	(52)	(60)	(19)	(15)
School 2 (n = 51)	2	7	36	2	9	38	7	32	11	25	26	30	7	11
Suburban	(04)	(14)	(71)	(04)	(18)	(75)	(14)	(62)	(22)	(50)	(50)	(59)	(14)	(22)
School 3 (n = 54)	3	18	18	5	20	23	4	41	4	22	31	19	11	23
Alternative	(06)	(34)	(34)	(09)	(38)	(43)	(08)	(78)	(08)	(42)	(58)	(36)	(21)	(43)

Note. The numbers in parentheses are percentages.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Parent, Best Friend, and Romantic Partner Relationship Qualities

	Mother (n = 159)			Father (n = 159)			Best Friend (n = 155)			Romantic partner (n = 74)		
Relationship Qualities	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range
Female												
Satisfaction	6.01	2.43	2-10	5.18	2.62	2-12	7.51	1.98	2-10	7.98	2.12	3-10
Commitment	20.12	4.86	5-25	17.22	6.21	5-25	19.27	4.66	5-25	19.88	3.96	10-25
Separation-Protest	6.81	2.46	2-10	5.46	2.72	2-10	7.52	2.12	2-10	8.75	1.42	5-10
Proximity-Seeking	14.95	5.92	5-25	11.22	5.36	5-25	19.20	5.01	5-25	20.25	4.03	7-25
Secure base	10.46	3.53	3-15	8.86	4.01	3-18	11.48	2.96	3-18	12.62	2.26	6-15
Respect	10.11	3.61	3-16	9.06	3.78	3-18	11.73	2.78	4-16	12.48	2.18	6-15
Companion	7.34	3.02	3-15	5.84	3.16	3-18	11.12	3.05	3-15	12.28	2.55	5-15
Male												
Satisfaction	6.47	2.52	2-10	6.00	2.47	2-10	7.73	1.72	3-10	7.18	1.87	2-10
Commitment	19.70	4.85	5-25	18.87	5.40	5-25	18.17	4.23	7-25	17.65	4.02	10-25
Separation-Protest	6.62	2.44	2-10	6.10	2.52	2-10	6.69	2.13	2-10	7.55	1.86	2-10
Proximity-Seeking	13.72	5.16	5-25	12.61	5.13	5-25	17.24	5.23	6-25	17.76	4.41	10-25
Secure base	10.32	3.26	3-15	9.56	3.48	3-15	10.51	3.04	4-18	11.05	2.56	5-15
Respect	10.24	3.47	3-15	9.52	3.59	3-15	11.12	2.55	4-15	11.73	2.03	7-15
Companion	7.19	2.59	3-15	6.91	2.61	3-15	11.56	2.44	6-15	12.18	2.14	8-15

Tables 3 and 4 indicate that female commitment to mothers was negatively associated with six of the seven romantic relationship qualities. Similarly, female companionship with a romantic partner was negatively associated with five relationship quality variables with mothers. In fact small to moderate negative associations between mothers and romantic partners were a consistent trend across all the quality variables, except separation protest. This same pattern of negative associations was observed for girls' ratings of fathers and romantic partners, albeit slightly lower. In contrast, among male adolescents there were small, inconsistent, and nonsignificant associations between parents and romantic partners (Table 4). In summary, findings indicate that females with close relationships to parents tended to have lower quality relationships with boyfriends. For males, however, perceived quality of romantic relationships appears to be independent of filial quality.

The results in Tables 5 indicate a small to moderate negative pattern of associations between girls' reports of relationship quality between fathers and best friends. Companionship to fathers was the strongest negative predictor of best friend relationship quality. Relationship satisfaction, respect and companionship to best friends were also consistent negative predictors of paternal relationship qualities. In contrast, associations between female relationships with mothers and best friends were small and nonsignificant. Table 6 indicates a unique pattern of association for male adolescents. Commitment to mothers and respect from mothers were the strongest positive predictors of male adolescent best friend relationship qualities. In addition, relationship satisfaction, commitment, and separation protest behaviors with best friends were consistently related to maternal relationship qualities for males. The overall pattern for males and mothers indicates a positive association with best friend qualities, except

Table 3

Correlations between female adolescent relationship qualities with parents and romantic partners

	Romantic Relationship Qualities						
Relationship Variables	Satisfaction	Commitment	Separation-Protest	Proximity-seeking	Secure-base	Respect	Companionship
Relationship with Mother							
Satisfaction	-.03	-.01	.14	-.14	.01	-.13	-.30
Commitment	-.31*	-.37*	.11	-.43*	-.25	-.42*	-.38*
Separation-Protest	-.07	-.13	.25	-.17	.07	-.22	-.40**
Proximity-seeking	-.16	-.13	.14	-.14	-.01	-.23	-.38*
Secure-base	-.25	-.33*	.07	-.31	-.10	-.28	-.44**
Respect	-.16	-.17	.08	-.27	-.06	-.20	-.32*
Companionship	-.10	-.09	.12	-.23	.02	-.17	-.30
Relationship with Father							
Satisfaction	-.07	-.03	.01	.11	.07	.14	-.24
Commitment	-.25	-.34*	-.07	-.34*	-.20	-.29	-.32*
Separation-Protest	-.11	-.14	.07	-.10	.05	-.14	-.33*
Proximity-seeking	-.18	-.09	.03	.01	.01	-.09	-.32*
Secure-base	-.17	-.24	-.03	-.20	-.02	-.16	-.35*
Respect	-.15	-.12	-.12	-.12	-.10	-.05	-.25
Companionship	-.06	-.05	.01	-.02	-.03	-.09	-.18

Note. Table includes only data from female adolescents who were in a romantic relationship at the time of the study, N = 40. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 4

Correlations between male adolescent relationship qualities with parents and romantic partners

	Romantic Relationship Qualities						
Relationship Variables	Satisfaction	Commitment	Separation-Protest	Proximity-seeking	Secure-base	Respect	Companionship
Relationship with Mother							
Satisfaction	-.15	-.02	-.10	-.08	-.09	.09	-.16
Commitment	-.05	.10	-.01	.06	-.04	.16	-.13
Separation-Protest	.17	.11	.23	.24	.10	.15	.11
Proximity-seeking	-.02	.15	-.08	.10	-.03	.21	-.22
Secure-base	.01	.10	.03	.01	.03	.14	-.07
Respect	.12	.22	.11	.17	.10	.20	-.04
Companionship	.01	.02	-.05	-.01	.01	.06	-.03
Relationship with Father							
Satisfaction	-.17	.05	-.16	-.24	-.10	.14	-.11
Commitment	-.11	.11	-.11	-.10	-.02	.23	-.03
Separation-Protest	.00	.06	.05	.12	-.01	.09	.17
Proximity-seeking	-.12	.11	-.20	-.07	-.14	.24	-.23
Secure-base	-.14	.06	.00	-.02	-.02	.09	-.13
Respect	.05	.20	.03	-.01	.11	.22	.07
Companionship	-.03	.08	-.10	-.16	-.02	.15	.00

Note. Table includes only data from male adolescents who were in a romantic relationship at the time of the study, N = 33.

Table 5

Correlations between female adolescent relationship qualities with parents and best friends

	Best Friend Relationship Qualities						
Relationship Variables	Satisfaction	Commitment	Separation-Protest	Proximity-seeking	Secure-base	Respect	Companionship
Relationship with Mother							
Satisfaction	.07	-.01	-.04	.01	.04	-.10	-.08
Commitment	.04	.00	.10	-.04	.02	-.14	-.10
Separation-Protest	.07	.01	.15	.03	.08	-.10	-.06
Proximity-seeking	.06	.04	.02	.06	.10	-.06	-.08
Secure-base	.06	-.03	.07	.02	.14	-.03	-.03
Respect	.00	-.03	-.02	-.08	.04	-.06	-.16
Companionship	-.01	-.01	-.08	-.03	.01	-.11	-.03
Relationship with Father							
Satisfaction	-.17	-.19	-.26*	-.07	-.14	-.23*	-.28*
Commitment	-.26*	-.23*	-.14	-.23*	-.14	-.23*	-.30**
Separation-Protest	-.22*	-.20	-.08	-.09	-.07	-.25*	-.21
Proximity-seeking	-.27*	-.24*	-.22	-.13	-.15	-.22*	-.32**
Secure-base	-.22*	-.22*	-.19	-.16	-.04	-.17	-.26*
Respect	-.29**	-.20	-.28**	-.26*	-.20	-.18	-.41**
Companionship	-.34**	-.35**	-.33**	-.27*	-.29**	-.31**	-.30**

Note. Table includes all female adolescents who reported best friend relationships at the time of the study, N = 76. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 6
Correlations between male adolescent relationship qualities with parents and best friends

	Best Friend Relationship Qualities						
Relationship Variables	Satisfaction	Commitment	Separation-Protest	Proximity-seeking	Secure-base	Respect	Companionship
Relationship with Mother							
Satisfaction	.29*	.16	.18	.02	.08	.18	.10
Commitment	.42**	.32**	.24*	.24*	.17	.26*	.27*
Separation-Protest	.34**	.21	.42**	.10	.17	.21	.17
Proximity-seeking	.22	.15	.18	.17	.18	.20	.07
Secure-base	.29*	.24*	.23	.15	.19	.15	.15
Respect	.35**	.25*	.23*	.23*	.16	.25*	.14
Companionship	.01	-.07	-.02	-.01	-.01	-.07	-.17
Relationship with Father							
Satisfaction	.22	.10	.00	-.06	-.07	.10	-.05
Commitment	.32**	.21	.05	.20	.07	.17	.15
Separation-Protest	.22	.13	.19	.00	.00	.14	.00
Proximity-seeking	.15	.12	.06	.14	.06	.17	-.03
Secure-base	.16	.14	.08	.05	.06	.01	-.03
Respect	.31**	.26*	.12	.21	.13	.21	.08
Companionship	.00	-.03	-.01	-.10	-.05	-.07	-.19

Note. Table includes all male adolescents who reported best friend relationships at the time of the study, N = 68. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 7

Correlations between female adolescent relationship qualities with best friends and romantic partners

	Romantic Relationship Qualities						
Relationship Variables	Satisfaction	Commitment	Separation-Protest	Proximity-seeking	Secure-base	Respect	Companionship
Relationship with Best Friend							
Satisfaction	.35*	.24	.13	-.04	.29	.21	.16
Commitment	.29	.42**	-.02	.17	.22	.34*	.16
Separation-Protest	.21	.05	.52**	-.04	.42**	.13	.08
Proximity-seeking	.14	.18	.01	.39*	.22	.29	.07
Secure-base	.33*	.14	.26	.03	.53**	.27	.17
Respect	.36*	.41**	.05	.25	.38*	.52**	.30
Companionship	.17	-.04	.16	-.10	.20	.21	.22

Note. Table includes all female adolescents who reported best friend relationships and romantic relationships at the time of the study, N = 39. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 8

Correlations between male adolescent relationship qualities with best friends and romantic partners

	Romantic Relationship Qualities						
Relationship Variables	Satisfaction	Commitment	Separation-Protest	Proximity-seeking	Secure-base	Respect	Companionship
Relationship with							
Best Friend							
Satisfaction	.02	.08	.30	.07	.13	.34*	.07
Commitment	-.14	.29	.41*	.34*	.21	.32	.17
Separation-Protest	.06	.15	.52**	.31	.35*	.20	.16
Proximity-seeking	-.17	.13	.27	.25	.14	.30	.03
Secure-base	-.08	.13	.33	.17	.34*	.31	.01
Respect	-.15	.20	.20	.18	.07	.36*	.09
Companionship	-.10	.14	.18	.14	.01	.45**	.18

Note. Table includes all male adolescents who reported best friend relationships and romantic relationships at the time of the study, N = 33. *p < .05. **p < .01.

for companionship with mothers, which was unrelated to romantic relationship qualities. For fathers, the associations were much weaker. There is a trend of positive associations between male best friend relationship satisfaction and commitment and six of the paternal relationship qualities, although only three of those associations reached statistical significance. Thus, for female adolescents, the paternal relationship was most strongly associated with romantic relationships, while for males, the maternal relationship was most strongly associated. Interestingly, the direction of the associations differed for males and females.

The results in Tables 7 and 8 indicate that for both males and females there is moderate consistency between best friend relationship qualities and romantic relationship qualities. The strongest associations were between similar scales (i.e. those adolescents reporting a high degree of secure base behaviors with best friends also tended to report a high degree of secure base behaviors with their romantic partner). Female companionship with best friends was relatively unrelated to romantic relationship qualities. The same was generally true for males, except that male companionship with best friends was moderately related to respect from romantic partners.

Differences in Parental Relationships for Adolescents In and Outside of Romantic Relationships

To explore the influence of adolescent romantic partners on family relationships and peer relationships, relationship qualities were compared for adolescents with and without romantic partners separately for boys and girls.

Independent samples t tests[2] were used to assess differences in sample means on relationship quality variables, with a test-wise alpha level set at $p < .05$[3]. The standardized mean difference, a measure of effect size, was obtained by calculating the mean difference between groups for each variable, and dividing by the pooled standard deviation. The resulting effect size is the difference between groups in standard deviation units. Based on criteria suggested by Cohen (1977), .20 is considered small, .50 moderate, and .80 large.

The results indicate that girls without romantic partners, compared to those with, reporting higher levels of quality in relationships with mothers (See Table 9), with effect sizes ranging from .37 to .60. The differences are statistically significant for five of the seven relationship qualities with mothers. The same pattern of differences was observed with father-daughter relationship quality, however, none of the differences reached statistical significance. . No differences in parental relationship quality were found for boys as a function of romantic partner status. Similarly, no differences in best friend relationship quality were found for boys or girls as a function of romantic partner status.

Relationship quality and sexual activity

In exception to the previous set of analyses, analyses were not done separately by gender for the sexual activity scales due to the small sample sizes (sexual activity data available for n=25 adolescents in romantic relationships). Table 10 indicates that, in general, closeness to mother and father are negatively related to sexual activity and risky sexual behaviors, such as

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4 Although it is common for researchers to use an omnibus multivariate test followed by specific tests (contrasts), this procedure does really does not correct for alpha inflation. Therefore, researchers may use a more stringent alpha level ($p < .01$) which roughly corresponds to Bonferonis correction for multiple tests of statistical significance (Kellow, 2000). In addition researchers should evaluate the effect sizes, which was done in this study.

[5] To correct for alpha inflation, it is possible to choose a more stringent alpha level, such as .01, which is very close to the Bonferoni correction for multiple significance tests. Even using this more stringent alpha level, most of the tests remain statistically significant at $p < .01$.

multiple partners and risk of STD's. In particular, a feeling of respect from and companionship with fathers are most strongly inversely related to sexual activity and risky sexual behaviors. In addition, closeness to romantic partner, specifically commitment to and companionship with a romantic partner, are positively associated with adolescent sexual activity and risky sexual behaviors. Interestingly, however, length of time in a romantic relationship does not seem to be related to adolescent sexual behaviors. In general, there are only a few small associations between adolescent-best friend relationship quality and risky sexual behaviors, although these associations were not statistically significant.

There are no associations between relationship qualities with parents, and influences on decisions to abstain from sex. However, adolescents who report high relationship qualities with their romantic partner are less likely to rely on parents or morals when making decisions about having sex. These negative associations are moderate to strong for satisfaction with, commitment to, and companionship with romantic partners. There are also positive associations between best friend relationship qualities and adolescent reliance on peers and risk factors for making a decision not to have sex. For those with positive best friend relationships, they were more likely to list peers and risk factors than parents and moral reasons for not having sex.

Table 9

Females' Parental and Best Friend Relationship Quality for Adolescents With and Without Boyfriends

	With romantic partner (n = 74)		Without romantic partner (n = 84)			
Relationship Quality	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	T	Effect size
Relationship with mother						
Satisfaction	5.38	2.38	6.59	2.36	-2.34*	.51
Commitment	18.80	5.57	21.32	3.79	-2.44**	.52
Separation-Protest	6.35	2.51	7.22	2.37	-1.64	.36
Proximity-seeking	13.15	5.52	16.59	5.86	-2.76**	.60
Secure-base	9.50	3.49	11.34	3.38	-2.46**	.54
Respect	9.33	3.69	10.82	3.43	-1.92	.42
Companionship	6.63	2.97	8.00	2.95	-2.13*	.47
Relationship with father						
Satisfaction	4.80	2.71	5.55	2.52	-1.29	.28
Commitment	16.33	6.69	18.10	5.65	-1.28	.29
Separation-Protest	5.15	2.69	5.76	2.76	-1.01	.22
Proximity-seeking	10.58	5.76	11.87	4.93	-1.08	.24
Secure-base	8.35	3.93	9.36	4.08	-1.13	.25
Respect	8.63	3.87	9.48	3.68	-1.02	.22
Companionship	5.25	2.60	6.40	3.57	-1.67	.37

Note. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 10

Correlations of Parent-Adolescent Relationship Quality with Adolescent Sexual Activity

				Influenced decision not to have sex			
Relationship Quality	Had sexual intercourse	Risky sexual behaviors	Pregnant	Parents	Moral	Peers	Risks
Mother							
Satisfaction	-.16	-.03	.14	.09	.00	.13	.05
Commitment	-.13	.03	-.03	.06	.02	-.02	-.08
Separation-Protest	-.19	-.14	.16	.13	-.08	.11	.08
Proximity-seeking	-.20	.05	.05	.09	.05	.15	.05
Secure-base	-.22	-.15	.02	.08	-.01	.13	.07
Respect	-.13	-.13	-.08	-.04	-.08	.12	-.07
Companionship	-.13	-.13	-.08	-.04	-.08	.12	-.07
Father							
Satisfaction	-.10	-.20	.19	-.01	-.08	-.05	-.11
Commitment	-.17	-.28	.09	.08	.07	-.07	-.03
Separation-Protest	-.21	-.28	.24	.11	-.00	-.00	-.01
Proximity-seeking	-.17	-.08	.26	.07	.02	-.07	.01
Secure-base	-.24	-.27	.15	.12	.06	-.04	.02
Respect	-.11	-.43*	-.08	-.01	-.06	-.06	-.10
Companionship	-.14	-.40*	.23	-.01	-.08	-.09	-.02
Romantic Partner							
Satisfaction	.27	-.25	-.01	-.37	-.68**	.02	.03
Commitment	.58**	-.02	.02	-.37	-.47*	.01	-.15
Separation-Protest	.33	.05	-.24	.11	.14	.15	-.08
Proximity-seeking	.13	.20	.28	.04	-.20	.07	.19
Secure-base	.29	-.08	-.01	-.00	-.06	.17	.35
Respect	.21	.18	-.03	-.20	-.07	.09	.17
Companionship	.40*	-.14	.06	-.58**	-.55**	.12	.11

Length of time in relationship	.08	.22	-.06	.15	.20	.13	-.25
Best Friend							
Satisfaction	.06	.18	-.01	-.04	.08	.11	.06
Commitment	.13	.19	-.23	.05	.19	.13	.14
Separation-Protest	-.03	.01	-.21	.20	.19	.25*	.28*
Proximity-seeking	.07	.34	-.06	.16	.23	.15	.30*
Secure-base	.02	-.11	-.11	.10	.23	.18	.30*
Respect	.12	.08	-.14	.02	.11	.16	.19
Companionship	-.07	.20	.05	.08	.25	.10	.29*

Note. Table includes all adolescents who reported on present or past sexual activity at the time of the study, N = 51. Correlations with romantic relationship quality include only those reporting on sexual activity who also have a romantic partner, n = 25. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Discussion

Findings draw strong connections between adolescent social worlds and suggest that parental relationships are a powerful force in shaping the emotional and sexual lives of teen peer relationships. At the same time, findings indicate that peers and especially boy/girlfriends exert considerable, albeit less, influence on parent-adolescent relationships. Three models of parent-peer linkages - compensatory, independent and continuous - were presented as possible explanations for the fit between the quality of adolescent relationships with parents and their relationships with best friends and boy/girlfriends. The degree of model fit was hypothesized to be a function of peer relationship type, namely that links between parents and best friends were expected to be independent, whereas links between parents and romantic partners were expected to be negative or compensatory. In fact, model fit was tied to the gender of the adolescent and, to a lesser extent, peer relationship type.

Model fit and gender

Among girls, the compensatory model was supported for romantic partners and, unexpectedly, for best friends as well. Findings suggest that adolescent females seek greater time, commitment, support from their best friends and boy/girlfriends if these emotional provisions are not met with parents. It may be argued that a compensatory model cannot be justified based upon correlational data, which fails to explain the direction or timing of effects. Since we do not have pre-romance data, it cannot be assumed that the family context variables impacted adolescent romances and friendships or if the reverse is true. To be sure, findings indicate the causal pathway between parents and boy/girlfriends is bi-directional. Adolescent girls without boyfriends reported greater filial closeness, suggesting that close and committed

romantic relationships create some emotional distancing in parent-daughter relationships. Yet, findings related to time spent with boyfriends suggest that the effect of romances on parental relationships is limited.

The duration of the romantic relationship was unrelated to ratings of parental closeness or parental commitment. This was true for the total length of time in the romantic relationship, as well as for how many hours were spent with the boy/girlfriend on weekly basis. Even more surprising, the length of time spent in the romantic relationship was not related to emotional closeness and commitment to romantic partners. Considering this set of findings it does not appear that families experience a slow deterioration in the quality of parent-child interactions over the course of an adolescent romance, and, even more striking, adolescent romances do not appear to grow stronger with time. Rather, it appears that girls who begin a romance with low levels of filial closeness may be quick to form commitments and high expectations for emotional closeness. The corollary is that filial closeness may inhibit or even prevent some adolescent girls from seeking strong emotional ties to their boyfriends regardless of how long the relationship is ongoing. In summary, the road to romantic commitment and emotional reliance on boy/friends is short if paved with weak parent-daughter ties. Whereas in the context of close family relationships, a daughter's strong emotional commitment to a boyfriend is more likely to be delayed.

The compensatory view is also consistent with previous research showing that adolescents seek increasing levels of intimacy and nurturance from peers while these same provisions show little change with parents (Buhrmeister, 1996; Hunter & Youniss, 1982). Given these longitudinal trends within parent and peer relationships, developmental pathways *between*

these relationship types would depend upon what level of filial closeness at the beginning of the adolescent transition. Adolescents who begin with weak parental ties will show an increasing emotional distance between parent and peer relationships. In contrast, adolescents beginning with strong parental ties will close the emotional gap between relationship types. Cross-sectional data of these two longitudinal trends would reveal a significant negative relationship between parents and peers, which is what was found in the present study. Girls may enjoy closeness with parents and peers, but high levels of connectedness in the family may limit or inhibit high levels of closeness in peer relationships. Said another way, peers do not take away closeness from parents as much as they take-up the role of a close relationship. The same parent-peer pattern is expressed very differently with boys.

In contrast to girls' reports, boys' reports of closeness to girlfriends were found to be unrelated to their reports of closeness to parents. In addition, differences in parent relationship quality were not linked to romantic relationship status among boys (e.g. boys with and without girlfriends). Consistent with our original hypothesis, however, boys reported a positive association between their relationships with best friends and parents (mothers and fathers). In summary, boys tend to view parent and peer social worlds as consistent or independent of one another. Gender lines appear to divide the manner in which parent and peer social worlds are integrated during adolescence.

Gender differences may be due to how males and females compartmentalize parent and peer relationship as similar or different relationship types during adolescence (Savin-Willams & Berndt, 1990). Furman and Simon (1999) maintain that adolescents view peer relationships similarly, but separate from filial bonds, and that best friends and romantic partners are sought

primarily for affiliative provisions. Indeed, the first part of Furman's conceptualization is supported by the current study, which revealed strong positive associations between closeness ratings of best friends and boy/girlfriends. Indeed, positive associations between friends and romantic partners were found among boys and girls, suggesting a lack of gender differences in how peer relationship types are integrated. Yet, the second part of Furman's model, that boys and girls view parents as distinct from peers is not supported by girls' reports. Instead, findings suggest that girls, but not boys, begin to view peers as targets for attachment-type support, especially when these provisions are found wanting in the family context. A number of theoretical explanations have been used to explain gender-typed behaviors and expectations in romantic relationships (See Feiring, 1999). For instance evolutionary theory maintains, "males tend to seek partners based on physical attraction, whereas females seek mates who can provide for themselves and their offspring" (Miller & Benson, 1999; pg. 99). Males appear to separate relationships into distinct categories and maintain boundaries to prevent contamination between relationships. This conceptualization is similar to gender differences in identity development, where males construct a self separate from others and females' construct identities that are socially integrated (Feiring, 1999). Even though females may seek emotional provisions from sexual partners to a greater extent than males, seeking emotional compensation in romantic relationships may put adolescents at risk for precocious sexual activity and risky sexual behavior, as discussed in the next section.

Parental relationships and adolescent sexual activity

Findings indicate that the quality of parental relationships, especially with fathers, may function as a strong protective factor against adolescent precocious sex and risky sexual

behavior. In fact, all the parental relationship quality variables were negatively related to the sexual activity variables, suggesting that girls and boys are more likely to have intercourse and engage in unsafe sexual practices if they are emotionally disconnected from parents. Interestingly, no best friend or romantic quality variable was significantly related to risky sexual behavior. In contrast, father respect and companionship were the most salient predictors of risky sexual behaviors. Interestingly, these variables identify the two most troubled areas of father-daughter relationships during the adolescent transition (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Based on a survey of daughters' complaints about fathers, Youniss and Smollar reported that "a lack of respect" was the most often cited category. Additionally, a sharp drop in father daughter companionship during the adolescent transition may fuel emotional distancing as fathers become increasingly removed from their daughters day-to-day emotional lives. In summary, these findings may point to the importance of family context as a better predictor of unsafe sexual practices than the quality of the romantic relationship itself.

Consistent with previous research (Levesque, 1993, Rostosky et al., 1999), we found that adolescent reports of commitment and companionship to romantic partners were the most salient predictor of sexual experience. A number of parenting variables were indirectly related to adolescent sexual experience, in that parental commitment, and the three attachment features (secure base effect, separation protest, and proximity seeking) were consistent predictors of romantic commitment and companionship. Furthermore, adolescents who identified parents as an important influence in their decision not to have sex were less likely to be emotionally committed or spend time with their romantic partner. Based upon girls and boys reports of

parent and romantic relationships, parents are clearly implicated as a significant force in shaping adolescent sexual lives and, in many ways, more powerful agents than boy/girlfriends.

Limitations and Future Directions

The data was gathered from an ethnically homogeneous sample, thus limiting the external validity of findings. This research was largely exploratory in that no previous study has examined the same questions. Similarly, this research was limited to gathering data on heterosexual relationships. Gay and lesbian relationships among adolescent males and females may show different patterns of integration with mother and father relationships. As such, an important next step is extending the research questions to ethnically and sexually diverse samples.

The present study was limited to data gathered from a single source, adolescent reports. The single source method, however, has been defended by other adolescent researchers (see Steinberg, 1990; Wintre, M. G., Yaffe, M., & Crowely, J., 1995), who argue that adolescent perceptions are valid representations of their experience, whether or not their perceptions are accurate with respect to actual behaviors. In fact, social desirability has been found to be most problematic when using parents as the data source to assess aspects of filial relations. Nonetheless, gathering parent and romantic partner data would add to our understanding of how parent and peer social worlds are integrated. For instance, if adolescent girls from disconnected home environments seek emotional compensation from romantic partners, it would be important to understand if the boyfriends do the same. Given the lack of association in boys' reports of parent and girlfriend relationship quality, it appears that consensus is unlikely. In fact, the findings from this study may be in line with adult studies of romantic attachment (See Feeney,

1999), which suggest that among insecure partnerships, expectations for emotional support tend to be discordant (e.g preoccupied females tend to partner with avoidant males).

An important next step in this line of research is gathering longitudinal data that can track changes in closeness to mothers, fathers, best friends and romantic partners during middle adolescence to young adulthood. Longitudinal studies could examine if the addition of a close friend or a boy/girlfriend results in immediate or gradual changes in the quality and nature of filial relations. Similarly, pre-romance data on parent and best-friend relationships could be used to predict the levels of closeness and commitment adolescents seek with boy/girlfriends. If longitudinal data confirms that emotional compensation occurs in romantic relationships, as this study suggests, a logical question is whether peer compensation predicts socio-emotional and academic adjustment outcomes. Given the relatively short duration of most adolescent romances, longitudinally data may also show whether or not adolescents resume previous levels of adjustment and filial support upon the dissolution of sexual ties.

Findings from this study point to a need for more research in the area of parental companionship, which has received relatively little attention in recent years. A number of studies have reported that by early adolescence most children report more time spent with peers than parents (Larson, 1991; Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996). Since most adolescents are "having fun" with someone outside the family, contemporary views on parenting have focused on the parents' role as consultant (Wintre, & Crowley, 1993) and negotiator (Baumrind, 1991; Hill & Holmbeck, 1986). As consultants, parents are available to confide in for important life decisions, but are mostly removed from everyday activities. Yet, as this study suggests, the benefits of parental companionship appear to remain critical through late

adolescence. Spending time together maintains previous levels of closeness while at the same serves as a form of parental control. When adolescents spend time with parents for the purpose of doing something together, parental monitoring is a natural byproduct and loses it typically negative stigma.

Summary

Findings suggest that the lines of influence connecting adolescent relationships with parents and peers are not always drawn by intention, but rather are significantly shaped by a family context. By limiting observations to the things parents do to impact the dating life of their son or daughter we miss the subtler and more powerful indirect influences of the way parents are with their children. Perhaps one of the most important findings indicates that parent-adolescent closeness, especially with daughters, appears to act as a critical protective factor against over-involvement with romantic partners and risky sexual behavior. Adolescent girls who lack a sense of closeness and security in the family context may begin to seek stronger emotional commitments from best friends and boyfriends. In summary, not all peer relationships are created equal to the extent that not all adolescents want or seek the same relationship provisions from their romantic partner or best friend.

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